

raspberry city, 1988 by eddiepeach (orphan_account)

Category: IT (2017), Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Eleven being a little shit, Good times, Multi, Recreational Drug Use, SEX!, Senior year, Trauma, ben and bev are married despite being like nineteen because thats just how it is, boys being young and cute, but a cute one, canada?, good fun with the not-parents, pot's great ask mike mike agrees with me, queer culture?, road trip au, the it kids cause ive watched the movie four times in the past two weeks, university!, way too much description sorry, will is precious, will with powers/will being a badass

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Summary:

"And... charcoals? Yes, charcoals. They feel like lipstick, they're so smooth."

Will isn't sure if Mike keeps talking, but he's caught up in a loop of Mike-kissing-sex-cigarettes, stumbling over fuck shit so in love, before returning to the loop.

He watches the muscles of his back, and the slope of his shoulders and jaw. He watches the flutter of his fingers and his eyelashes, and the way his freckles dance and his stomach jumps every time he laughs.

"I love you."

Mike glances at him over his shoulder, a bundle of weed in one hand and a peach in the other. He bites into it, and says, peach juice dribbling down his chin, "I love you too."

ft Mike and Will being soft™, and in love with gratuitous descriptions of each other, lots of boys being in love, plenty of kissing, and Eleven being An Absolute Angel

1. curls

"Canada? Why the fuck would we go to Canada?"

"For fun, you dipshit!"

"You just wanna go because Jonathan suggested it. And don't call me a dipshit! That nickname is reserved for Dustin."

"What about me?"

Will sighed and tucked his smile into his sweater. Next to him, Max snorted milk out her nose as she watched Lucas and Dustin bicker. Next to her, Eleven was staring at Nancy in rapture, watching her edge her eyes in brown eyeshadow and her mouth in glossy, pale pink. Will pretended not to notice the way Jonathan's eyes flickered to her every couple moments. An elbow left a sting on his arm, and he glanced at Mike. He was trapped as the mediator in the ongoing argument between Steve and Lucas, which mostly involved making fun of either or both of them given the opportunity.

Will stared at him for a few moments. His hair, as he'd entered puberty, had curled, going bouncy and shiny and soft-looking. It was long now, too, long enough to brush across his shoulders, to catch over his ears and in the collar of his turtlenecks. It was long enough to braid and pull into a bun, which Eleven had been delighted to discover. His bones were sharper now, too. The fall of baby fat from his face and collarbones and arms had left him gaunt and hollow-looking for a little while. His skeleton-like build for the summer between sophomore and junior year had earned him new jabs from rude classmates and awkward questions from a shocked Joyce, who had quietly pulled him aside to ask if his food was staying in his stomach, if it made it there at all.

But now, during winter break of senior year, his cheekbones and jaw are sharp, but defined. He's gone wiry. His body doesn't reflect his winter diet of hot cocoa and candy canes (dipped in eggnog, usually), instead, he's all lean muscle and pointy elbows.

"Lucas, shut up," Max said, leaning over the table to slap his shoulder.

"A road trip with everybody would be amazing! You're just pissed 'cause Steve suggested it before you could." She was using that tone of voice - the one that was part disappointed teacher, part mother and part bemused girlfriend. They all knew it well - but Lucas and Dustin heard the most of it.

"Road trip?" Eleven asked, her deep stare pinning Max.

Max smiled. "Yeah, when you get in a car and you go travelling with friends or family or something."

"There's lots of junk food and driving," Steve said.

"And a ton of pictures and sight-seeing," Mike added.

Eleven grinned, pretty and wide. Will softened a little at that, felt his ribs expand with the space she gave him. His eyes flitted over her black turtleneck sweater, at her peachy pink nails and mouth and the brown around her eyes, at the smooth lines of her nose and cheekbones, the long sweep of her hair. She had been hard to see, sometimes, under all her grime and torn dresses and old converse. But now, none of them could forget it.

Nancy's blush clicked close. Her eyes were narrowed, chewing on her lip as she caught Steve's eyes. For a few moments, they held each other gazes and didn't move, eyebrows and mouths and noses twitching. Steve broke their stare to raise an eyebrow at Jonathan, who grinned, his smile curling over his cheeks, crinkling his eyes.

"So," Nancy said, leaning forward to rest her elbows on the table.

"Where do you shits wanna go?" Steve asked, leaning back in his chair, bringing an arm up around the back of Jonathan's.

Dustin, Lucas and Will exchanged wide eyes. Max and Eleven bent their heads close together, and Mike grinned at Steve, who winked.

"The ocean," Max said, decision ringing in her voice. Eleven nodded.

"A big city," Dustin said, "The biggest place I've been to is Indianapolis - remember that trip we took in seventh grade?"

"To the art museum," Mike said, resting his chin on his hand, "When Lucas threw up on the bus, and then you threw up on me, and I threw up on your two and Will was the only one of us *not* covered in puke?"

"That's the one!" Dustin said, a smile catching his cheeks.

Nancy wrinkled her nose. "So, Vancouver is on the list."

"Where's Vancouver?" Lucas asked, flattening his hands on the table, starting to trace patterns like roads and highways across its surface and through the spilled salt.

"Most densely populated city in Canada - it's on the West Coast, in British Columbia," Dustin said. When Lucas coughed (*nerd*), under his breath, Dustin flipped him off, initiating a mature battle of wits in the form of obnoxious raspberries being blown at one another.

"Columbi-a," Eleven corrected, ignoring the boys. "I'd like to see the beaches there, swim in the ocean. Be alone." She frowned and tugged on her ear. She couldn't figure out how to say what she wanted to say, stuck between pronunciations and synapses not firing.

"You want to be alone, but with all of us?" He asked.

She lit up, her eyes big and wide, and her mouth turning at the corners. "Yes!"

Mike smiled at her, fond, but not quite as soft as it used to be. School and time outside of the cabin and Max had taught Eleven a lot, from doing her makeup to planning a Dungeons and Dragons campaign to societal norms and politics. And somewhere in there, Eleven had learned the instinctual difference between someone you loved and someone you were in love with.

Mike hadn't been the latter. She had told him this frankly, one day after a long, fourteen hour campaign, sometime during their freshman year.

Three years later, no one really mentioned it anymore.

"Vancouver, beaches, ocean, time with just us," Jonathan said,

scrawling on a napkin. He looked up, huffing his hair out of his eyes. "What else?"

Mike's mouth fished open and closed a few times. His eyes trained on the table and his cheeks flushed pink. Will bumped their knees together beneath the table, his eyes trained on Jonathan.

"Bookstores," Will said, because he knew Mike wouldn't. "And coffee shops - art supply stores. You're bringing your polaroid, right, Jonathan?"

His brother gave him a closed mouth smile and nodded, loopy handwriting swirling over the page.

Jonathan, to Will, looked the same as he had four years ago. He still had dark circles under his eyes, the pale cheeks and the limp hair. He still loved making breakfast in the morning, and he still loved Joyce and cigarettes and his camera more than breathing. He still loved Nancy Wheeler. (And Steve Harrington, but they didn't talk about that, even if they all knew *something* was going on there). Will knew, of course, that his brother had changed. Of course he had - he was twenty-one. He was an adult. He could drink legally. Will had drawn him enough to know that he was different than he used to be, that his lines had morphed and grown. Just like they all had.

For a long time, Will had thought he looked just like he had in their last year of middle school. Nothing about him had changed, he'd thought, his hair was the same and his eyes and his hair and his build. He'd mentioned this one day, absently, sitting at the kitchen table, drinking coffee as Nancy grumbled her way through the crossword puzzle in the Hawkins Holler. An amused sound had fallen from her mouth.

"Bullshit, kid."

Will had shrugged, still feeling like eighth-grade Will, small and insignificant, and very, very scared of being queer.

She'd never said anything about it, never mentioned it to his mom or his brother, and for a few days it was like the conversation had never even happened. Will forgot about it entirely, buried it under

chemistry homework and new art projects. But he'd come home one Wednesday to a leather folder laying on his bed. The folder was dark brown, torn and worn at the edges, lightened with age and stained with what looked like coffee. Inside the folder were hundreds of photographs and slips of paper. Each photograph was dated, a neat little inscription in the bottom lefthand corner of each one. Each slip of paper had little phrases scrawled on it, in the same neat handwriting as the photographs. Some of the phrases were quoted, little dashes with one of his friend's names coming right after, and others weren't. Some were long, and some looked like they had been recorded and transcribed, filled with 'uhs' and 'ums' and stutters and repeats. Some were just absent comments about Will's hair or his clothes, about his drawings or his paintings or his eyes, and he couldn't tell who they were from. But there were others that he had tucked into his wallet, into his sketchbook and his watercolours, and he knew they were from Mike.

he gets this smile, sometimes, right after we finish a campaign and everyone's yelling and smiling and he gets wrapped up in hug after hug, and it's so bright. it's huge and like - pretty? He's pretty, sometimes. when it's cold and he catches the winter sun, or when it's dark and his skin goes all soft in the moonlight. and his eyes! holy shit, nance, his eyes are gorgeous. so big and green and shit, i'll never forget how wrong it felt to see them dark when the mind flayer had him, nance. will's eyes have to be bright. he's so b[eautiful] - wait, nance, are you - are you recording this? what the fuck?

his art belongs in musuems. and he doesn't even fucking know it! he doesn't think he's going anywhere, or that he's going to university and that he's going to be amazing and famous and everyone will know how wonderful Will Byers is.

he's my best friend. nothing will ever change that.

did you see how much Will grew over the summer? he's like, up to my chin now! it's crazy. but i can still hug, so it's fine, you know?

There's a looseness to these statements, one that Will has started seeing more and more - the effects of pot on Mike's tongue and filter. He can't imagine Nancy getting stoned for fun, but he can imagine her doing it for research.

"Will?"

Max's nudge pulls him out of his thoughts, and she smiles when he blinks and shakes his head to attention. "Yeah?"

Max looks over at Mike, on Will's other side.

With a wide grin stretching his mouth, his freckles being tugged all over, his curls big and wide, Mike says, "How do you feel about a roadtrip?"

And looking at Mike's wide grin and his freckles and his curls, looking at his slightly crooked, hooked nose, at his huge starfish hands and his freckled forearms, and feeling the press of their knees together beneath the table, Will says, "I feel fucking fantastic about a road trip."

2. hands

It takes them 48 hours of driving to get from Indianapolis to Vancouver.

It takes them eight days, nine nights, nine shitty motels, eleven greasy MacDonald's, thirteen packs of cigarettes and an impossible number of shitty gas station meals including, but not limited to: doritos, rotten ham sandwiches, jerky in every form, peanuts, sunflower seeds, iced tea, sprite and - once they got over the border - chocolate smarties in probably unholy - and definitely unhealthy - quantities.

Mike throws up at least twice a day, every day for the entire trip. Lucas and Dustin can't stand being near him while it happens, and they gag and reel away the moment he begins to retch. The smell makes Eleven's eyes water, and Max goes pale as she watches the muscles of his throat and shoulders work.

Their second night in Vancouver, he wakes up in the middle of the night, saliva gathering in his mouth, feeling his stomach knot and role, his hands go cold and wet. He trips on the corner of the bed, his eyes ringing and his vision blooming. For a split second he sees a demogorgon, sees its face flower and its spit spatter across the floor, over his nose and mouth. He can smell it - the damp, rotten-earth smell that had swept over the room when Eleven had banished it for the first time, the same smell that had clogged the bus as he watched Steve fight off four demodogs.

He gags.

His eyes sting and his nose runs. The sharp, painful bite of bile catches at the back of his throat, up into his nose.

He crawls until he reaches cold tile floor, until he can fumble with a heavy ceramic toilet lid.

"Mike?"

He retches again. A soft hand brushes across the back of his neck,

curls into the shine of his hair. Bad heat prickles across Mike's skin, clawing at his freckles and he whines, dropping his head onto the toilet seat, trying to breathe through his mouth. Cold fingers pluck at the hem of his shirt, urge him back into a steady chest. He shivers as Will tugs on his shirt, pulling it up and over his head.

Water runs, slow and trickling. A cloth twists and lays itself across Mike's mouth. It's pulled away, and the tap runs again. The cloth comes across his forehead, down his cheeks to his collarbones and the back of his neck. Mike groans, pressing himself back into Will's chest. His head is tilted back against the smaller boy's shoulder. Will presses a cold hand to Mike's sternum, thin fingers spreading wide.

"Mike?" He asks.

"Hmm," Mike says softly.

"You ok--?"

Mike pulls away from Will, leaning forward abruptly, retching. He doesn't move for a few beats, exhausted, sick-hurt bubbling in his throat.

His lower back and stomach and chest ache when he leans back against Will. A click, and the shitty light above the shower turns on. Mike breathes, through his mouth, trying to ignore the taste in his mouth, and feels the comforting spread of Will's hands across his ribs, his warmth at his back.

He doesn't know how long they sit there, but he feels something in him shift. He's done for tonight. It's been eight days straight of puking every few hours - he knows his body better than he did before. His head, filled with acidic cotton balls and bitter honey, is beginning to clear. The smell of Will's skin and clothes is starting to sit in his nose and the feeling of his steady breaths, the heat of his thighs on either side of Mike's hips, his cold hands against his stomach and his bony chin biting into his chin are registering as grounding sensations. Mike hums. He smells like oil pastels and the cigarettes he and Jonathan have been smoking by the pack.

"Better?" Will asks softly. The word tickles Mike's ear and neck.

He hums again, presses back into Will, just slightly. Water runs and a warm cloth passes over his mouth. A toothbrush, already coated in toothpaste, presses into his hand. Mike twists his fingers into the ones resting on his sternum.

"C'mon, let's get you in the shower, you smell terrible," Will says.

"Asshole," Mike mutters, but stands on shaky legs, tries not to lean too much of his weight on Will.

He's so tiny, he thinks, fond, so much littler than me. Little Will. Lill? No, no. Wittle? He cocks his head. That's worse.

He sits on the edge of the bath, and Will's hands brush against his stomach on their way to combing through his hair.

"M sorry the road trip has been such shit for you, Mike," He says. He curls his finger around a curl and tugs, watches it spring. The bath cranks. Will leans over to run his wrist beneath the water, the way his mom does. Satisfied, he turns back to Mike, who's half-asleep, leaning against the shower wall.

"S not shit," Mike mumbles, fumbling to pull his sweatpants off, eyes half-open. "You're here."

Will smiles.

Dustin, Lucas and Max, Jonathan and Nancy spend two weeks in Vancouver - they dart from market to market, and Jonathan takes so many photos he has to go and buy more film every day. They spend days upon days on Granville Island, and skitter through and down alleys to find vendors and secret, unlocked doors.

But two days into those weeks, Steve, bending low to speak to Will, asks if he'd rather be somewhere quieter. Vancouver is beautiful, but dirty and smoggy and bustling. People squish together in ways that he's only ever seen in New York in movies, and the pattering stink of cars and the skid of bikes against the asphalt makes Will's stomach twist. There are too many dark corners. Will says yes, and smiles a little bit when Steve's face lights up. Through the day, he watches

Steve crane down to ask El, watches her bright eyes as she says yes with a bright voice. Steve has to tilt his chin up to ask Mike. Will watches Mike's mouth, reads his lips without effort.

Yes! Just you and me? 'Cause I think Will wants out of the city too.

He doesn't catch what Steve says, just sees his hands come up to gesture loudly, watches him shift his weight. From here, Steve and Mike could be brothers. Their shoulders are both thin, but strong, hidden beneath black turtlenecks and yellow rainjackets - their hips and legs are the same, too, skinny and wrapped in denim. They've both rolled their jeans above their ankles and their white chucks are dirty with age and Vancouver street dust. Their dark hair is curling, damp around their ears and over their neck. They bring their hands up to tuck their behind their ears in the same moment, and laugh with crinkling eyes.

Steve slaps Mike's shoulder and nods at Nancy. (Mike never slaps people's shoulders - he's all about hugs and long touches and holding hands, nothing about Mike is as guarded as slapping shoulders).

"Hey asshole," Nancy says, and nudges Dustin, who's arguing with Lucas, Max, El and Jonathan about lunch (four against his one). Dustin turns to her, ready to fight her, too. She cuts him off. "We need to find a car rental place and you've got the map, hand it over or quit arguing and make yourselves useful."

"A car rental place?" Max says, momentarily distracted from their argument. "We just got here!"

Nancy nods at Steve, "Steve wants to go on an adventure to the Island. Whoever wants to go with him will go with him, and the rest of us will meet up with them when we're ready. Or we'll meet up in Seattle or something."

"So," Jonathan says, and glances at Steve. Steve winks and Jonathan flushes.

"Which of you shitheads are coming with me?"

The truck rattles beneath the mattress under their backs, shaking and humming in time with the gravel on the road and the faint murmur of *Footloose*. Will pretends that if he strains, he can hear Steve's off-pitch shout-singing and Mike's rough, gritty, stuck-in-a-ditch-past dark voice. He and Eleven are laying on their back in the canopy, on a bed they stole from a shitty Vancouver motel with fantastic mattresses, talking animatedly, trying to keep their fingers and hair and faces out of view of the possible police cars driving by.

Steve's blasting down the road at 125 miles an hour, whipping around corners, and they're going to get pulled over before they reach Chesterman Beach, but Will can't bring himself to care. His ribs and stomach ache from laughing at Eleven's impression of Hopper, Dustin, Max and Lucas. Dustin's mostly involves her hissing and spitting through her teeth like a cat, stretching her smile to mimic his, giggling through her nose. Hopper's is gruff and mainly involves saying 'I'm gonna get fat alone' and talking about Joyce in a mocking, high-pitched sort of voice that Will hopes he never hears Hopper ever use in any situation. She does Lucas and Max at the same time, rolling to face away from Will, bringing her arms around herself and playing at making out. It's loud and obnoxious and her voice is a scary spot-on impression of Max during sex. (The entire party has, unfortunately, been subjected to it many, many times).

"What about me?" Will asks, still giggling around the edges.

Eleven's giggling too, but she breaths in, wipes a hand down her, and suddenly her expression is perfectly clear. He expects a caricature, a joke, like all the others have been, but when she turns to him with her eyes wide and her pupils dilated, with an expression he recognizes from photographs as his own, his breath catches and he stares.

"My mom said I have to be home by midnight," She says, shoulders shrugging and her voice is lower, more even. It's mellow and smooth, and he never would have guessed that that was his voice to others. To his own ears, his voice is pitchy, irritating. It's one of the many reasons he doesn't like speaking near strangers. Her face changes, all of a sudden, and her mouth falls open, just a little bit. She stretches her neck to make her neck look longer, and says, "What? You can't stay over? Why not?" The 'what' comes out amid a voice crack, but

the rest of the words are deep and rough, scratchy and comforting. She keeps her eyes focused keenly on Will's face. He wonders if that's how Mike looks at him.

She morphs once more, going back to the wide-eyed look he associates with a skinny, funny-looking boy with a preference for watercolours and men over school and women. Her smiles *cracks* into a smile, a little exasperated, but small and fond. And she says, in his voice, "We have school tomorrow, Mike, mom's letting me stay out late enough as it is." Her voice (his voice?) is smooth like honey, and she still has an expression of wonder and fondness and done-ness on her face.

He knows that face.

He's seen it on Hopper, looking at his mom as she smokes, and on his mom, looking at Hopper as he cooks with El and Jonathan. He sees it on Lucas' face when Max kisses him in front of her locker at school, and when she punches white boys in the face for saying something about the two of them. The expression squats, gentle like a caress, on Jonathan's face when he talks about the time he spends with Steve and Nancy. It's on Nancy's face when she talks about her boys, about how they bicker and play and smile. Steve wears it for everyone, and so does Dustin - two lovers, one who hides, and one who refuses to. Through a fog of not belonging to himself, Will remembers that look on Mike's face when he said his name in the hospital, when he woke up from the Upside Down for the first time, when he sweated and panted from a nightmare, when he told him, voice gentle, that they would go crazy together, when he told him that becoming his best friend was the best decision he had ever made. He saw that expression on Mike's face last night, when he felt the first touch of Will's touch on his back and through his hair.

Eleven's face has returned to her own. For a single, irrational second, Will misses Mike.

"Will?" She asks softly, bringing one of her hands up to brush his bangs from his eyes.

He blinks owlishly at her. "Do I--" His voice cracks. "Do I... look like that? When I - When I talk to Mike?"

She looks at him. "Yes."

"All - All the time?"

She pauses, lips pursing. She wrinkles her nose and nods assuredly. "Yes."

"Even when I'm mad at him?" Will asks. He's pushing, but he thinks El understands, because her face softens. She opens to his questions.

"You're never mad at him," She says, and it's frustrating that that's so true.

"Well, what about when he's done something stupid?"

"It's worse when he does something stupid." She sounds almost smug.

Will scrubs the heels of both hands into his eyes. "Everyone sees my face when I'm with him. It looks like that to everyone?"

"No," She murmurs, before rolling her eyes. "Mike *never* sees it, even though it's always there."

Will can't tell if the feeling in his gut is relief or something else.

"And Mike," He says, last night standing before him like a mirage, hope crowding in his gut, "Mike looks like that... when *he* looks at *me*?"

Eleven just looks at him, wordless. She's more sensitive to thoughts than she used to be, more sensitive to the twisty wrong-side-up feeling of seeing *into* someone, instead of just *at* them. She knows that he knows.

He thinks about the feeling of holding Mike's hand, of his weight in his lap, the weight of his head on his shoulder, the flex and heave of his muscles as he emptied his stomach into a shitty motel toilet. He thinks about twisting the taps of the sink and bath, running a face cloth beneath it, and his deep, unerring desire to hold Mike while doing it. He shivers. The cold, comforting wave of his *pull* running over his skin, his talent, turning on taps and running wash clothes beneath sweet water. He had pressed a kiss to Mike's temple, and

listened, just for a moment, to the thrum of *comfort gentle in love* that was bouncing around his mind, springing from every spring of his skull.

Oh, Will is so fucked.

Eleven smiles. "His mind is so loud, isn't it?" Her words seem worn, like she's been preparing for the time they could have this conversation, like she was waiting for someone to relate to her in this way. He aches for her loneliness.

"Yes," Will says, fighting his desire to cower in the face of her, of her normalcy of this thing that strums on his gag reflex. "Just like when he--"

"When he talks! It's the same, and he chatters just like normal. His thoughts, they..." She chews on her lip, the vocabulary just out of reach.

"Bump into each other," Will says, and it feels like a revelation, like finally sketching Mike's hair without a model. "Can you... Can you hear all of us? All the time?"

She shakes her head, nose wrinkling in distress. "No! Only in the Upside Down. Everything is louder there. Can you imagine?" She adds. "If we could hear Max and Lucas' thoughts?"

Will fakes gagging, and Eleven erupts into laughter.

"Now you gotta cut loose! Footloose! Kick off your Sunday shoes!"

If Mike sings any louder, he's gonna lose his voice by the time they reach the coast, but he can't resist. The roads here are twisty, rough and winding, surrounded by tall, thick redwood trees, but Steve is heavy-footed as ever. They almost tip around the corners, and Will and Eleven peek at the back of Mike's mind. The trees on the banks on the sides of the road droop down to greet them, and tiny crystal streams run down them, glinting through the mist, glittering with the gentle patter of the rain.

The sky is heavy and grey, and it hovers right over the trees, gathering around their tops.

Maybe we're the ones on top, and the trees bloom from the clouds to grow into the earth.

"I'm pretty sure Kevin Bacon is the only reason I made it through my senior year, you know?" Steve says, smiling wryly.

Mike grins. "When Will and I were studying for SATs, we'd go and see *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* everytime we were super fucking frustrated with a concept in math or something. We'd freak the fuck out in the theatre, laughing at everything, repeating all the lines to each other. And we'd go home and sit down at our notes and realize exactly what we'd been missing."

"Seriously?" Steve asks, eyebrows hiding beneath his hair.

"Yeah! It fucking worked, too. Will and I fucking aced our SATs - he got 1280. He was so proud, dude, you should've seen his face when he found out. And Joyce's! She almost started crying,"

Steve glances at him, his face the picture of bemusement. "What about you? How'd you do?"

"I got 1420," He says dismissively.

Steve's face flinches through a myriad of emotions - pride, disappointment, jealousy, shame - and Mike punches him in the arm. "Don't do that, man. I have so much respect for you - for everything you've done. Your girlfriend is at Harvard and your boyfriend is at Columbia and you're earning a fucking good living doing something you love."

Steve frowns and opens his mouth, startled around the edges.

Mike rolls his eyes. "Steve, everyone knows about you, Nance and Jonathan. But that's not the point! You're a damn good nanny, Steve, okay? No matter how much we tease you about it, you're good at this. I've talked to those kids - they think you literally hung the fucking moon. And it's bullshit that Billy and them call you a fairy because you like children, because you'll make an amazing dad one

day. Okay? We all admire you, Steve, don't forget it."

Steve blinks a few times, his knuckles going white against the steering wheel.

Mike smiles at him, soft.

"W-Well, that's great, kid." He pauses, and the silence is thick with the quiet of the rumbling road. "Thank you."

"Anything for you, Harrington - you gonna plant one on me?" Mike grins, pushing at Steve's shoulder.

Steve pinches his ear and pulls at the soft hairs on the back of Mike's neck, who slaps his hand and laughs. "I'm not gonna plant one on you, Wheeler, but *you* should plant one on that boy of yours before we all lose our minds and Dustin wins 200 bucks off me." He smirks, big and smug, raising his eyebrows at a red and black mess of flushed cheeks and curly hair.

"Steve!" Mike yelps.

"I know, I know," Steve says, "200 bucks was steep and I shouldn't have let Dustin goad me into it, but we've all been waiting since the end of your sophomore year for the two of you to get together."

Mike stares, mouth open, eyes wide. "I - I don't -- what? I don't want to kiss *Will*, why would I - why would I want to kiss him? We're best friends, Steve, it's not like that--"

Steve's shaking his head before he's even finished talking, tapping his fingers on the steering wheel, the amusement lingering on his face overshadowed by seriousness. Mike notices the crook of his nose and the sweep of his hair and understands what Nancy sees. And then he flushes pink, his gaze snapping to the road.

"Cut the bullshit, Mike," Steve says, and his voice is even and gentle. "You care about Will, right?"

Mike twists his fingers into his turtleneck, absently noticing that Steve's is almost identical. He nods.

"Right, and you never..." Steve clears his throat. "You don't want to see him get hurt again."

Mike shakes his head. He remembers the prickling heat warmth huddling in front of the toilet yesterday and remembers that that same feeling had spread over him the two times he'd lost Will - uncomfortable and prickly and horrible, like always being sick, on the verge of puking without the relief of doing so.

"I'm not gonna sit here and explain to you all the ways you're head over ass over head in love with the artistic dipshit lying in the canopy, because you already know."

It wasn't a question, but Mike nods.

(Will smiling at him, his soft hands on his back, his even breath at his back, the feeling of hands on his sternum and the sound of the tap creaking to life, a washcloth running over his mouth).

"So," Steve presses, smacking his hands against the steering wheel suddenly. "Get your shit together, dumbass!"

Mike laughs, bringing his hands up to his face, pushing his hair away from his face, his sweater covering his fingers. A stray curl falls over his forehead and he blows his breath out his mouth. It flutters, and settles back across his face. Sighing, he glances out the window, caught by the patter of rain against the windows, the woosh of the trees rushing past their windows.

A sign on the edge of the road flashes by him.

He sits up suddenly. "Steve! Left!"

"What?" Steve squawks, but he's already shoulder-checking, signalling and turning left, grinning as they tip slightly. Mike winces for Will and Eleven, laying on a mattress in the drafty canopy.

"Wow," Steve breathes, slowing, mouth falling open.

Mike's breath catches.

"I can't wait to show Will," Mike says, soft soft soft.

Steve groans. "Yeah, it's a great make out spot, nerd. Now get out of the truck, I'm gonna shove you in the ocean."

Mike buries his face in his hands. "Steve!"

But Steve is already slamming the door of the truck closed. Mike hears him smacking the canopy, hears Will's and El's chatter as they crawl out, their quiet exclamations at the wash of dark pinks and blues and bright reds on the horizon.

"Mike!" Will shouts, knocking on his window. Mike jumps, his face splitting into a smile. "Come on!" He hefts a camera into view. "The sunset won't last long."

And as Mike pushes open the door, as he shivers at the warm breeze flooding over his skin, and the smell of salt and fish and kelp that clogs his nose, he watches Will. He watches him snap photos of the water, the sand, the rocks like old giants out in the tide, the sun, of El, giggling as Steve runs around, barefooted, the girl bouncing on his back.

Walking towards them, he contemplates, waffling.

Steve ruffles Will's hair, falls over laughing at something he says, and Mike makes up his mind.

He definitely wants Steve to win that bet.

Notes for the Chapter:

by the way, a canopy is a thing you put over the bed of a truck.

and i've never written will with /abilities/ so thats something.

as always, lemme know what you guys think - recommendations, questions, prompts, hopes, drama - and ill get back to you ASAP.

my tumblr is @blue-by-auster

made

3. mouths

Click.

Mike looks up at him, his eyes and face soft as Will smiles at him. He's standing with his bare feet in the sand, his toes numb in the water. His jeans are clinging to his calves, and he's tugging his yellow raincoat around his shoulders, flicking curls out of his face. Will's wrapped in jeans, too, light wash ones rolled up above his ankles. His sweater, rich green and baggy and knitted, makes Mike want to hug him even more than usual. A curl is falling over his eyebrow. He reaches up to brush it away, to run a hand through his hair, still straight and long, but no longer confined to a bowl cut. His sweater shows off a sliver of pale skin as he does. His green eyes reflect the moon, just a touch. He can see bits of dark green, forest green, taupe and hot-cocoa-with-extra-honey in his eyes.

As he lifts his feet, he feels the sand clinging to him. He stops, just a few inches from Will.

"Mike?" Will asks, and his voice is soft, fond, a little confused. Mike knows that voice. It greets him every morning Will sleeps over, when he wakes up to long, lean limbs wrapped around his waist, a leg thrown over his hips, a head on his shoulder and hair in his mouth. He hears it on those mornings, when he asks Will if he wants coffee or cocoa. He hears it walking to school, at lockers, in cafeterias, in classrooms and dark rooms and art rooms. He hears it as he sits on the counter in his bathroom, as Will showers, because hot water still freaks him out less than cold water. He hears it, a phantom in the back of his mind, at night, just before he falls asleep. That voice mutters in his daydreams, lilting with a grin, and screams in his nightmares, leaves him cold, his heart between his teeth. That voice holds him, skids careful hands over his hair at four in the morning, post nightmare, on the Byers' front porch.

"Mike?" That voice is breathless, and Mike realizes how close he's gotten. He can feel the camera nudging against his chest as it dangles from the strap around Will's neck. He can pick out the hundreds of colours in his eyes, and just how not-chapped his lips are, how flushed his cheeks are, and the tracks from where he was crying

through the cold.

"Will," He says, and his voice sounds like the voice that greets him when he comes home - like revelation and cocoa, and D'n'D and the smell of a darkroom, like oil pastels and good paper and drying clay, like drugstore shampoo and raspberry lotion and secret, pale pink lipstick.

His heart is taking up all the space in his mouth. It's between his molars and his incisors and beneath his tongue, and it's pushing. It's pushing to get out, to shove past his teeth, to batter against his lips, to spill into the world, to run away from him.

He catches Will's eyes, and gets distracted as his tongue flickers out to meet his lower lip. He feels long-fingered fingers against his waist, against the side of his neck and his jaw. He brings his hands up, presses one to Will's back, the other to the fingers against his face.

He presses his mouth into Will's palm, and listens to his breath catch. He mouths at his wrist, turns his palm over to brush over his knuckles.

His hand, against Will's back, pushes a little, urges him closer, urges him into his body, bones and soft skin pressing together. He kisses Will's collarbone, the side of his neck, pauses at his pulse, to feel the steady fluttering pumping blood through the boy he's been in love with sophomore year. He kisses Will's jaw.

"Christ, Mike."

"Hmm?"

He hears his mouth stretch on a smile. Fingers curl into his hair, and tug, urging him forward, closed mouths pressed close together. Mike whines, low in the back of his throat, and ducks his chin to press harder against Will, licking over the seal of his mouth and into the warmth of his mouth. He tastes like cigarettes and creamy, sugary coffee.

His fingers come to the back of Will's neck and slip beneath the camera strap. It slips over his head, lowers gently to the ground, and

Mike crashes his mouth back against Will, his hands moving desperately. Sweeping up his spine, he catches his fingers in short hair. He slips his hand beneath Will's sweater and slides from the curve of his waist to the bumps of his spine. Cold hands cling to his hips beneath his jacket, and he inhales sharply. Their noses bump and Will hitches his leg a little up Mike's thigh, opening his mouth, sucking on Mike's tongue, tickling the roof his mouth.

"Will," Mike murmurs, dragging his wet mouth from another, across his chin and his jaw, to his ear. "Will, Will, Will."

"Mike."

He keens as Will scrapes his nails over his scalp, tugs sharply on his hair. He presses their hips together and their belt buckles click. Will *moans*, and Mike's hands tighten on the back of his neck, slide down to grip his thigh and urge him higher on his waist.

"Do you two *breathe*?"

Will presses his face into Mike's shoulder. He raises a hand to flip Steve off.

"You're the worst, Harrington," Mike says, one hand still high-up on Will's thigh, the other migrating down his back. "Shouldn't you be thanking me, anyways? Now Dustin owes you 200 bucks and I owe you *at least* a couple favours."

Steve scoffs. "A couple? Kid, you owe me, like, nineteen. And I'm cashing in my first one right now--"

"Ooh," Will says, wincing, "You sure you want to spend your first favour now? I mean, Mike's a pain in the ass about this stuff, he's gonna keep track."

Mike makes an affronted noise and nips at Will's earlobe, pinches his thigh. Will groans softly and grins at Mike's raised eyebrow, tugging pointedly at dark curls.

Steve's eyes widen, and he looks left and down. "Okay, okay, okay, stop. First favour, in permanent standing: no aggressive making out around me. I'm sleeping with both of your siblings and I will fill your

life with horrible details if I so much as see a *hint* of tongue, got it?"

Mike blanches a little and Will wrinkles his nose in distaste.

Steve grins, satisfied, ignoring the movement of Mike's hand from Will's lower back to his back pocket, or the way they shift against each other and bite their lips as they do. "Second favour: you're at least four doors down from me at the hostel, preferably on a different floor in a different wing, got it? And if I hear that you've scarred El with your *noises*--" Steve cuts himself off. "Well, she's scarier than me, so bear that in mind."

"Only seventeen favours left, *Steve*," Mike says, unfazed.

Steve stares at him for a beat. He remembers the first time he'd kissed Jonathan and turned around and kissed Nancy, and then watched each other. He remembers standing in front of Nancy and admitting that he was as in love with broad shoulders and sly smiles as small waists and freckled skin - the warm feeling that had crashed over him, with all the majesty of the ocean when she shrugged and said 'Me too, babe. Should we tell him?' He knows the smiles on their faces at movies, at music, at parties, with others, before sex, after sex, during sex. He knows their faces and bodies better than his. He loves them more than he knows how to love, and respects them with every fibre of his being - of their beings. He knows Nancy's perfume, and Jonathan's shitty shampoo. He knows their favourite albums and their favourite jokes. He knows the ways they hide, and the best ways to push all their buttons.

He's so in love the whole world tastes like raspberries and ice cream and mint tea.

But he also knows the ache in his chest when he wants to grab Jonathan's hand, when he wants to kiss him in cafés and diners, in front of his parents. It's the same ache that comes from watching Nancy frown when she kisses Steve, when she wants to kiss Jonathan, too. The same ache on Jonathan's face when people shout 'queer' and 'fag' the way they shout 'racist' and 'nazi.'

He can tell, just from these moments, how tangled up in each other they are. Their flushed cheeks and swollen mouths and the tightness

of their jeans and their wandering hands are only part of this. They hold each other not like the other might break, not like glass, but like if they don't hold the other they will break. They will fight and argue, steep and storm and snap. But Steve has a sneaking suspicion that these storms will be temporary, that they will end in mouths and smiles and bad jokes and lots of cocoa, given the healthy amount of it they already drink.

Who knows, maybe the world will let them hold hands, let them love and marry someday.

Someday, Steve thinks, eyes flicking between Mike's and Will's, like looking at Nancy and Jonathan.

"Okay, shitheads, get in the canopy. And I brought my bat, so if you two fuck back there, I will not hesitate to beat your asses."

"Hi," Mike says, charming and boyish fixed on his face. He leans onto the counter, just a little, and smiles at the boy sitting behind it. The boy raises his eyebrows, flickering over Mike and Will, whose sides are snug to one another, and then to Steve, who's rolling his eyes and exchanging a *look* with Eleven.

"You guys reserved a room, right?" He says, glancing down at a book with fading pages.

"Two rooms," Steve says, "One with a bunk bed, one with a double, preferably--"

"Right next to each other?" The boy asks, thumbing at a paper, raising his eyes to the boy who hops up onto the counter next to him.

"No," Eleven says, her voice amused and matter-of-fact. "Mike and Will... snore."

She says it suggestively, but not suggestively enough to be caught by anyone who doesn't go looking for queer people. She's observant, and these boys, behind their counter, are both wearing hickeys, flushed cheeks and shy smiles.

The boys snort. They grin at Mike and Will. "So do we," the one on the counter says, laughing as his boyfriend flicks his knee.

"Fuck you, El," Mike says, his smile so wide his eyes vanish into his laugh lines.

"I think Will's on that, Mikey," Steve says, and slaps eighty bucks down on the counter.

They spend a day and a half in the room of the hostel.

Before the day and a half, Steve slips a bundle of weed, a stack of rolling papers, and three boxes of matches beneath their door with a label saying *you're goddamn welcome, you fucking nerds*. Moments after the first package, three more arrive; Several boxes of condoms, a box of peaches, strawberries and plums and a loaf of bread, and a sketchbook and a set of charcoals. Mike opens the door, only in his briefs, cocks his head, and glances down the hallway only to see a set of white converse and blue jeans disappearing around the corner.

"What is it, Mike?" Will asks.

Mike turns around, and sees Will, all smooth, pale skin and long limbs, in the centre of the bed, bound in sheets. A cigarette dangles from his fingers. Smoke curls around his head, lazy, thick and sexy in a way Mike didn't know cigarette smoke could be.

"Uh," Mike says. "I think Steve left us presents?"

"Christmas," Will says flatly, smiling a little. "What'd he leave?"

Instead of answering, Mike bends and hefts the carton of fruit and a cloudy mason jar, and deposits them on the desk. Will, from the bed, raises the cigarette and his eyebrow. He watches the lean muscles of Mike's shoulders, back, and arms flex to lift Steve's gift, and shifts a little, thumbing at the hickey on the side of his neck. He and Mike had spent the eight hours since they had arrived at the hostel doing a combination of smoking, sleeping and kissing.

Lots of kissing.

Will tips his head back, feeling his breath hitch in his throat. Mike's hands and Mike's mouth and Mike's neck and Mike's hips.

"He gave us a *lot* of pot! Holy fuck, Will, this is a lot of pot. And rolling papers and like, three boxes of matches. Ooh! Fruit. Hmm, peaches, strawberries, plums, *and* a loaf of bread. Oh," Mike's tone changes from delighted to gentle, nearly reverent, "He brought you a sketchbook - a good one, I think, if I heard all the shit you were saying about paper right. And... charcoals? Yes, charcoals. They feel like lipstick, they're so smooth."

Will isn't sure if Mike keeps talking, but he's caught up in a loop of Mike-kissing-sex-cigarettes, stumbling over *fuck shit so in love*, before returning to the loop.

He watches the muscles of his back, and the slope of his shoulders and jaw. He watches the flutter of his fingers and his eyelashes, and the way his freckles dance and his stomach jumps every time he laughs.

"I love you."

The words walk out of him, simply and easily, the way his mom walks out of the room. An everyday thing, a normal thing, an unimportant thing and simultaneously the most important thing that Will has ever said.

Mike glances at him over his shoulder, a bundle of weed in one hand and a peach in the other. He bites into it, and says, peach juice dribbling down his chin, "I love you too."

Will wrinkles his nose at him even as his cheeks flush and his heart leaps.

"You're fucking gross, Wheeler."

"You just said you love me!"

"I do! Just not when you're gross!"

"Fuck you, Byers!"

"Then put that peach down and come here."

Notes for the Chapter:

hey thanks loves - have a wonderful day, fill in my
day with comments/concerns/judgements im here
for it if you're into it.

x

mads

4. tongues

Mike leans over him, blowing opaque smoke over his face. "Still love me?"

"Unfortunately," Will says, and pushes at Mike's shoulder. He plucks the joint from his fingers and rolls it between his own. He catches it between his lips, drags and drags and drags on it until he feels like his lungs and throat and diaphragm might burst. His pupils dilate, and his breathing slows, and his gaze becomes transfixed on Mike.

Mike pinches his ear and smears strawberry juice over his cheek and eyebrow. "What about now?"

"Careful, Mike. I might leave you for Dustin."

Mike makes a face, before it cracks open and he starts giggling. Tiny, iridescent bubbles spring from his wide mouth and Will grins in return. Mike presses his face into Will's shoulder and collapses onto him. He looks up, eyes hazy, and gives Will a dewey grin. It stretches his cheeks, and he looks fourteen - gangly and mismatched and looking at Will the way he's always looked at him, like someone precious, like someone unbreakable, like someone made of diamond and coated in smelted ore and tarnished silver.

Will has always been in love with that smile.

With the sunflower yellow of the sheets around their waists and the clean white of the walls, Mike's dark hair and pale skin, his freckled nose and cheeks and hands and shoulders and his grin, he looks like something out of a painting. The smoke, thick and soft and white, curls across his face and over his ears. His collarbones are sharp, hollowed by the shadows left by the clouded sun filtering through the windows. The lines of his shoulders and forearms are distinct, clear. His hands, bird-boned and broad, fall over his face as he smiles at Will. Will reaches for the camera on their bedside table.

"Don't move," He murmurs. Mike raises an eyebrow, but obeys, still and solid and safe, pressed up against the length of Will's body.

Click.

Click.

"Still love me?" Mike asks, and lays a kiss against Will's neck.

"Well, I'm still taking pictures of your ugly face, aren't I?"

"Asshole," Mike murmurs. He presses his mouth to Will's in his next breath, licks over the seal of his mouth, slow and languid. Searching for something. His hands search too, falling heavy over Will's stomach, sliding to his hip. He curls his tongue through Will's, sucks on it, and smirks when Will moans. He bites on his lower lip and tugs. He feels the sharp ribs of the smaller boy pressing into his stomach as he arches, a tiny noise falling out of his mouth. A broad hand matches the curve of a bony, pale hip, catches on his ass and hitches his leg around Mike's hip.

Will gasps.

Mike laughs into his mouth and nips at his throat, his collarbone, his chest. He catches a nipple between his teeth and exhales roughly at the whimper that tumbles from Will. He bites at his ribs and licks across his stomach. Will tangles curly hair between his fingers and pulls. Mike groans, digs his thumbs into the jut of Will's hipbones, sucks a mark into the left one, the one with the shaky stick and poke of a potted plant.

"Fuck, *Mike*," Will breaths.

"Yes, love?"

Will's cheeks flush. And isn't that ridiculous - his boyfriend's mouth is about six inches from his cock and they're both covered in hickeys and the room stinks of pot and Will's camera is full of pictures he hopes Jonathan and Nancy and Steve and their friends and oh God, his mother never see - and yet he's blushing at petnames.

He's so fucked.

"You're an asshole," Will says, but it doesn't have the resolve he'd been hoping for. It comes out on a tremble of breath as his stomach

goes concave and his hands tense in Mike's hair. "Mike," He says, and he's back to begging. "Please - *fuck*."

Glancing down at Mike, he sees flushed cheeks and dark hair. He gets a small thrill of delight through knowing that Mike's cheeks are flushing too, even if it's because he's got a *thing* for Will begging that they're going to have to discuss at some point, and because he's got a cock in his mouth, but whatever. The point is that Will is not alone in this.

Hands curve to his thigh, and his calf is manoeuvred to meet a strong shoulder and back and Will arches.

He whines. Mike laughs, and then does something *obscene* that makes Will's teeth and gut ache with how good it feels. "Mike, please--"

"So, El said that you two were *finally* done, which is-- holy fucking shit! Shit! Shit shit shit shit, not done! They're not done! Eleven Jane Hopper, you piece of shit. Stop laughing, you asshole, you scarred me for fucking life, Jesus Christ, you're the absolute worst." Steve's voice bursts into clarity, and Mike pulls off Will and turns his head towards the door, but Steve and his loud voice and his profanity are already disappearing through the bang of their door closing and his footsteps retreating down the hallway.

Mike looks up at Will, who's still got his hands in dark hair.

There's a beat of silence.

"Did Eleven--" Mike starts.

"Yeah," Will says, faintly.

"I can't believe she got *Steve*, he's always bragging--"

"--That he can't be tricked by kids, yeah."

Mike's face is twitching a little, at the corners of his mouth. Will presses his lips into a crooked line.

"Poor Steve," Will says, in an unconvincing sympathetic tone.

"Poor Steve," Mike agrees, his voice shaking.

They catch each other's eyes. Will cracks first, bright little giggles tumbling out of his mouth, one after the other, like acrobats. He brings both hands up to his face. Mike drops his head onto Will's hip and *breaks*. Laughter and snorts and guffaws slip out of his mouth, one after the other and he can't stop.

He's not even that embarrassed - he knows what Will looks like, knows the look on his face when Mike is doing anything to him, and he knows it looks fucking good. He knows that the lines of their bodies are soft and sharp and attractive. He's just sorry that Steve - who has had sex with Mike's *sister* and with his boyfriend's *brother*, who's a brother and a mother and a best friend to them - had to witness the equivalent of his kids fucking.

Oops.

Mike looks up at Will, who's still hiccuping laughter. His eyes are huge and dark and so green Mike spends a lot of time thinking that they can't possibly be real, and his cheeks are pink with embarrassment and laughter and want. His collarbones stand out and so do his ribs and his cheekbones. His hands are calloused and tiny - long-fingered, but half the size of Mike's. He wants that laughter for the rest of his life.

Panic swirls in his chest as he remembers the times that he hasn't had that laughter - when it was stolen by dark places and white laboratories and white jackets and dark snow. The prickling heat feeling of being sick without ever recovering floods his skin.

He crawls up Will's body and catches his still-giggling mouth against his own.

"I love you," He breaths, a little desperate. "I love you so much, Will, don't ever leave me"

"Promise," Will says, in between sharp inhales, his exhales trapped in the heat of Mike's mouth.

"Don't leave me," Mike says. "Not again."

A sob breaks from Mike's mouth and he kisses Will long and deep. He pulls away and his lips are against the smaller boy's neck, his Adam's apple.

"I won't," Will says. "I promise. I love you too much to leave, baby, I promise."

And even though it's naive and childish, even though it's the belief of an eighteen-year-old in love with a boy, Mike believes him.

Just for a moment.

Granville Island is loud and invasive and hustling. People shout in your ear and stop you to sell you things. Women flash their thighs and their breasts, and men wear shorts and shoes and nothing else, leering at people, confident and submissive in the same breath. People kiss loudly and shout louder. They smell of perfume and spices and piss and fish. They bicker and fight and scream and laugh in languages Nancy's thick tongue can't master.

She *loves* it.

She never thought she was one for big cities - for hustle and dirty streets - but here she is, in the middle of one, in love and giddy with it. Jonathan hasn't left her side since they arrived, but he buys new film every day, and she can't wait to relive the smell and taste and sight and sounds of Vancouver in her memories in the dark room of his New York apartment. It's strangely erotic, meeting a new city.

And, judging by the sex that she and Jonathan have had the last few nights, he thinks so, too.

She's learned more about people in the last few days than anything else. She's learned about nineteen kinds of curry and thirteen kinds of noodle dish from three different countries; she's learned the difference between couscous and rice and risotto, and the differences between her version of spicy and that of the Indian woman sitting next to her; she's learned about the artwork and the stories of the Haida, about their dark hair and fast hands, and the smooth edge of

their languages; she's learned that Jonathan loves to disappear through small doors and Lucas tries everything; she's learned that Max likes the arguments, likes the resolution that follows and the light burst of the insults that fall from people's lips; she's learned that other people live the way she does, with two men who love each other as much as she loves them and they love each other; she's learned that people like Mike and Will are a minority, sure, but a respected one.

She's learned that the whole world is not Hawkins, Indiana.

Jonathan points out that she knew this, because they've lived in New York for three years and Harvard has multiple queer clubs.

And she *knew*, cerebrally, from an intellectual perspective, that men loved men and women loved men and women loved women and that love didn't just come in pairs, because there's her and Jonathan and Steve, and Helen and Tanya from her Human Anatomy class in first year, and Xiu-Yan, Boya and Ana from her third-year Renaissance class.

But here, in the center of Vancouver, she *feels* it.

The possibility and desire for change *pulses* here.

It's erotic, without a doubt, and entrancing. It captivates her, that one day Mike could marry a man, or call himself someone who loves without gender-based prejudice without judgement; or that Jonathan and Steve could hold hands on the subway without being beaten half to death in an alley; or that someday the government will acknowledge that the gay disease is legitimate, that the men and women and others who have it deserve treatment and care.

Nancy is so in love she could choke.

"Nance!" Max shouts over the bass of a nearby busker.

Nancy snaps her head towards her, tilts her head to stare up at brown eyes. "What?"

"Jonathan called Steve! Him, El, Mike and Will are heading home!"

"Home?" Nancy asks, frowning, her freckles getting lost in the lines of her face.

Max shrugs. "They've been on the coast for three weeks, Nance. Maybe Steve's gone stir crazy."

Nancy tilts her head back and laughs. She combs her fingers through her hair, heavy with big city grease, and pulls it up into a curly mess onto of her head. Max tracks her movements. "If any of them are going stir crazy, it's Will! He loves people too much to be holed up in a tiny town with only Steve and Mike and El for company."

Max laughs, and takes Nancy's hand as she pulls through the crowds. A few of the vendors shout at them, ones that Nancy recognizes from the past few days, ones with names she can and can't remember, but with food or jewelry or jokes or voice or smiles that she'll never forget.

God, she loves it here.

"Max said you guys were heading home," Nancy says, fiddling with the sweat-dampened coins in her hand that she feeds to the monstrous payphone every few minutes. Jonathan is leaning against her back, listening to Steve with her.

"Dunno yet," Steve says, and his vowels and consenants have relaxed so much that Nancy barely recognizes his intonation as his own. "Will and Mike want to head to San Francisco, a couple of the guys here have been chatting it up to them. But I think El wants to fucking live here. That kid's gonna become a hermit crab if we're not careful."

"Understadable," Jonathan says.

Steve goes quiet. "Yeah." He hums thoughtfully. "If it's what's gonna make her happy, I won't stop her, you know?"

Nancy raises an eyebrow, pictures Steve's face, his lip between his teeth, his arms crossed and his brow furrowed, metaphorically chewing on something. Jonathan must catch it too, because he says, "What is it?"

"The kid's... well, she's house-hunting, I guess. She's been eyeing this cottage right on Chesterman Beach. She talked to a couple of the people along the strip, asking about flooding and food availability and the amount of wildlife on the beach, and the price of places like this and stuff."

"Could she afford it?" Nancy asks, curious. Her and Will both get stipends - military-service pensions, basically - from the government, mostly to shut them the fuck up. She had half-expected them to reject it on pretense when it was offered, but they're both too smart for that. They'll take the money and live good fucking lives, just to spite the assholes who twisted their throats and their minds and made their noses bleed and their fingers twitch.

"Oh yeah," Steve says, "She's been telling me about it. Apparently, it's like 10 grand a month."

"Ten?" Jonathan and Nancy say, incredulity painting their words.

"Yeah," Steve says, and pride creeps into his voice, "And I guess he's hoping to cover tuition for him *and* Mike."

At her back, Jonathan goes still. His hands against her stomach, don't move. They don't twitch and for instant he doesn't breathe. "What - What university?"

"Um," Steve says, "Columbia, dude. He got in, like, two months ago. Into their art program. And Mike got into their Art History slash English double major thingy, so they're both going. And with Will's crazy government shut-your-mouth allowance, he can cover their tuitions, help your mom with her morgage, and buy them an apartment in downtown New York without any problems. They won't even have to live off ramen, like we did, which is kind of unfortunate, you know? It's like a rite of passage--"

"Steve," Nancy interrupts, fingers clutching at her own. "Jonathan didn't know."

The line is quiet except for the rush of cars. "What? What do you mean he doesn't know?"

"Will never told me, Steve. Or mom. Why wouldn't he tell us?" Jonathan's voice is shaking, but devoid of clear emotion. Nancy holds his hand, just a little tighter, and wishes Steve could wrap his arm around Jonathan's shoulder, tug him into his chest.

"About the money?" Steve is chewing on his lip; his words are muffled.

"The money, the university, *Mike*, everything. He definitely didn't tell mom. She's gonna *flip*."

"Hey, hey, Jonathan, it's okay," Steve says, soothing, but firm, "It's gonna be okay. Come and meet us on the coast, and you'll talk to Will. He wasn't trying to hurt you, okay?"

Jonathan laughs, a little bitter. "No - but he doesn't want mom to worry about him and he doesn't want me to think he's being a clingy little brother by moving to New York. He doesn't want us to think that the money makes him the government's bitch or makes what they did to him okay. He's too fucking good for this shit, Steve." By the end of his words, his tone has lifted and changed, realizing as he speaks. Realizing how much he loves his brother, how smart he is, how much he loves other people and puts them before him, realizing that he didn't mean to hurt anyone at all, because Will Byers is too good to hurt.

"Wow," Nancy says, and kisses Jonathan's cheek. "That's the most I've ever heard you say when we're not having sex, babe, good job."

Jonathan slaps her arm. "Shut up, Nance." His cheeks flame a little bit. His mouth - his chattiness and his, uh, skills - are a focal point of teasing from his partners.

Steve groans, annoyed, and Nancy can sense a rant coming on. "I listened to your younger brothers *fuck for a day and a half*, and then I *saw* them because El told me they weren't doing anything. We've been here for three *weeks*. Three weeks and they're so loud I can hear them a floor up and like, six rooms down."

"Will and *Mike*?" Nancy says, exchanging wide eyes with Jonathan.

"Yes," Steve hisses, "Will and Mike and *oh God*, I thought Jonathan was loud, Will is even worse--"

"Stop," Jonathan says, shaking his head, his cheeks red. "No talking about my brother having sex with Mike, oh my God, I'm never going to be able to look at my mother *again*."

Nancy laughs, trying desperately to muffle it as Jonathan glares at her, the corners of his mouth twitching.

"At least *you* didn't *see it happening*. I saw--"

"Steve," Nancy says, warning in her voice.

"I saw Mike going--"

"For fuck's sake," Jonathan says, covering his ears, but Steve's laughing and Steve's talking, so of course, he's still listening, even if he's about to be scarred for life.

"I saw Mike going down on Will, and I swear to God if I had to suffer through *seeing it* you two can suffer through me telling you about it!"

"Ew," Nancy says, nose wrinkling. "Ew, ew, ew! Fuck, Steve. You're the worst."

"Hey, I can reenact the fucking noises if it--" Steve starts, but Nancy and Jonathan cut him off.

"No."

Notes for the Chapter:

some steve/jonathan/nancy love for you guys, and some rather risque boys, sorry about that, i got a little carried away.

5. smiles

Notes for the Chapter:

i didn't forget about this fic i swear!
also i feel like including crossover characters requires
a literal warning because i don't wanna, like, shock
anybody so - guess who watched 'it' four times
today? that's right, it's me. guess who shows up in
this fic? that's right, the kids from 'it'

Nancy and Jonathan, Max and Lucas and Dustin come crowing into the hostel. The boys at the front desk laugh and exchange high fives with Dustin and cigarettes with Jonathan, and point them towards the others without prompting.

Dustin doesn't know what he expected to see - but it wasn't this. He didn't expect the hostel to be empty but for them, or for how cozy it was, the commons covered in mismatched, overstuffed couches and armchairs, beaten and brand name guitars leaning against walls and blankets and pillows folded in piles on cushions. He didn't expect the tiny kitchen, the doorless cupboards overflowing with cereal and dozens of boxes of hot chocolate and tea, or the dozens of bottles of irish cream and whisky and rum (he didn't really know that anyone other than pirates drank rum), cheap and expensive bottles of vodka and tequila and gin, but no wine. He's never seen so much alcohol anywhere that wasn't a bar. One of the boys behind the desk catches him looking and gestures towards the fridge.

"There's a couple cases of good cider in there, too, but we haven't got any beer or wine. Makes Stan sick." He tilts his head towards the other boy, who was wiping at his face as he and Lucas laugh until they can't breathe. He's tall, and thin and pale, his hair huge and curly.

He looks at the boy standing next to him, who is short and pretty and white and watches him watching Stan. His smile is soft, and fingers twitch, as if to reach out. A purpling hickey stands out on his throat.

Dustin smiles through a twisting in his gut. He may not understand men who love other men or women who love other women, but it hurts that they can't love loudly like he could, or like Lucas and Max. It's the same twist he gets when he sees Nancy and Jonathan bend their heads together and their faces light up and knows they're talking about Steve.

"How long have you two been together?" He asks. The boy's cheeks flush and his mouth falls open a little.

"Um."

Dustin winks at him. "Dude," He says, "C'mon, you two are worse than Steve and Jonathan."

The boy's shoulders drop a little and his fingers uncurl from their clutch on his jeans. "Steve? The one with the--" He reaches up and points to his hair. "--hair?"

Dustin laughs, nodding. He points at Jonathan, who's leaning against the wall near Stan and Lucas, the smug grin of someone who cracked a really good joke all over his face. "That's Jonathan - Steve and Nancy's boyfriend. And that--" He points at Nancy, who's standing next to Max, crowded over a roll of film. "--Is Steve and Jonathan's girlfriend, Nancy."

The boy raises his eyebrows. "The redhead or the brunette?"

"Brunette. The redhead is Max, Lucas' girlfriend. Lucas is the one who's about to fall the fuck over with Stan."

He smiles and sticks out a small palm and long, tattooed fingers. "I'm Eddie."

"Dustin."

Eddie seems to hesitate, just for a second, before, "Are you - uh - queer, too?"

Dustin shakes his head, folding his arms and looking at Lucas and Jonathan and Stan. "Nah. I mean," He adds, looking over at Eddie. "Mike thought he was straight until he realized that he was head over

fucking heels for Will, so, maybe I'm not? But I don't know."

"I respect that, man. Shit, you guys are way more open than I expected, you know? I mean, it's not everyday we get nine people coming in, and five outta four of them are queer and proud to be, you know?"

Smiling, Dustin says, "We've been through some shit together, like life or death shit, so when Will told us he was gay--" Dustin shrugs. "--None of us really cared."

Eddie looks curious, like he wants to ask, and a little sick, like he already knows. He shakes himself, and reaches into his pocket, pulls out an inhaler and presses down shakily, breathing fast. Dustin almost asks, but Eddie seems like Will in this instant, caught between something real and something bad, so he doesn't say a word, just waits, quiet.

"Mike's the fucking tall one, right?" He asks, tucking the inhaler into his pocket.

"Yeah - he was tall even when we were kids, like five seven or something when we were in eighth grade."

"How tall's he now?"

"I don't know," Dustin shrugs. "He's way taller than Billy, Max's dickhole brother, who's gotta be about five ten, so probably six four, six five."

Eddie whistles, and then cocks his head. "Skinny as a fucking beanpole too. He looks like a friend of mine - they're kind of built the same. Super fucking tall, curly black hair, whole shebang. 'Cept my friend wears glasses that make him look like a fucking owl. Used to get picked on for that."

Dustin laughs, watching the tension in Eddie's shoulders ease, and the way his eyes flicker to Stan every few moments subside. "None of us were ever blessed with shitty eyesight - but we used to get insulted a lot. Pushed around." Dustin shrugs. "We were small and nerdy until I joined the football team and Lucas and Max joined track. Mike,

though - he was always really skinny. Will, too. But Will's been thin ever since--" He cuts himself off and looks at the ground for a moment.

"Since the bad shit," Eddie offers, and winks when Dustin nods gratefully. "Oh, uh, they're all napping, by the way. We were all up drinking and smoking at the bonfire last night and they never made it to their rooms."

"Bonfire?"

"For Canada Day," Eddie says with a smile that punctuates the bags under his eyes and the glacial movements of his hands. "July first, baby."

"I didn't know Canadians threw good parties."

Eddie laughs, tilting his head back. "I'm sure your friends'll tell you we do."

Eddie pushes off the couch he's been leaning against and slaps Dustin's shoulder. "They're over by the windows." He walks off towards Stan with a spring in his step, and Dustin wonders if he made him uncomfortable.

He glances around the room. The windows take up the entire front and side wall of the hostel, showing off docks and grey water and grey skies and dark green and brown islands. The rain hammers against the windows, pinging and pattering. Over in the far corner, where two couches face the ocean, he sees a foot and calf hanging over the back. As he gets closer, he realizes it's Steve. He's sleeping with his head on the arm and one foot over the back, his arms crossed and his nose tucked beneath the collar of his sweater. Two crossed ankles rest on his thigh, attached to long legs in sheer tights and a short jean skirt caught around thighs. El's face is smooth, her arm beneath her head as she curls on her side, her hair fluttering every time she breathes.

He smiles, fond.

He looks over at the other couch and expects Will and Mike in the

same position, only to find Will draped over Mike, his head buried in his neck and their fingers caught together. Mike's other hand is caught in Will's hair and Will's fingers splay wide over Mike's collarbone and throat, gentle and possessive. Mike is bound in a sweater, huge and foresty and woollen, and Will is wearing a black one that pools at his wrists and hands and hangs to show sharp collarbones.

Dustin raises an eyebrow. Nancy comes up beside him, and knocks their elbows together. "Will and Mike, huh?" He asks.

She nods. "Will and Mike and Mike and Will."

Dustin cocks his head. He knew that Mike was interested, of course. He's more observant than the others give him credit for, and he's seen Mike's fingers start and stop as he reaches for Will and the way he smiles when Will laughs or paints or touches him. He'd paid less attention to Will, hadn't wanted to ask him about the way his voice got so soft with Mike, because he didn't want to push.

"It's pretty cute," Dustin says.

"Don't tell Steve," Nancy says, looking over at him. "He's been listening to them fuck for three weeks and he's pretty fucking pissed."

"Oh, gross." Dustin wrinkles his nose.

"Shut up, Dusty," A groggy, muffled Will Byers says into the wool of Mike's sweater. "We're better than Lucas and Max."

"That is so not a comparison you wanna use, man."

"We're way worse than Lucas and Max, the fuck are you talking about, Will?" Mike tugs lightly on Will's hair and smirks lazily when he lifts his head and glares without heat. "Besides," Mike adds, "I'm not the loud one."

"Well, neither of us are the quiet one."

Mike shrugs and rubs his eyes as Will sits up, straddling his stomach.

"Coffee?" Will asks, clambering off Mike and wrapping his arms around himself.

Mike nods. "You want a smoke?"

"Sure, they're in--"

"Our room on the windowsill."

"Next to my sketchbook."

Mike stands and stretches and his fingers brush the wooden beams of the ceiling. He ducks and kisses the top of Will's head. Standing side by side like this, Will only comes up to Mike's Adam's apple, and his sweater gathers around his thighs. Will tilts his chin up and curls his fingers in the hem of Mike's sweater. A smile crinkles his freckles as he leans down and presses a lazy, open-mouthed kiss to Will.

"Could you not?" Lucas asks, affectionate but grossed out, the way best friends are with best friend's partners.

Will and Mike both raise a hand to flip Lucas off, and pointedly lick into each other's mouths, slow and eager and showy.

"It's revenge, man," Dustin says. "You and Max have spent the last three years making out every time you were within arm's reach."

"That's a hyperbole," El says, sitting up slowly, blinking at them all through tired eyes.

Dustin sticks his tongue out at her. She rolls her eyes and stands, stretching her hands above her head just like Mike had done.

Mike disappears into the kitchen with the overflowing cupboards to make coffee and blows a kiss to Eddie on his way, who laughs and pretends to catch it. Stan smiles and kisses the top of Eddie's head.

"Ugh," Steve says. He pulls his leg from over the back of the couch and curls into a ball, facing the ocean. He blinks. "It's so quiet, did Mike and Will *die* or what?"

"No," El said, and ruffles Steve's hair. "They were just too tired for

sex, I guess."

"And there's an audience," Nancy adds, flopping onto the couch and onto Steve's feet. Steve perks immediately at her voice, sitting up and grabbing her, pulling her into his lap without saying a word, tucking his nose into her neck and sliding his hands around her waist. She laughs and kisses his temple. Jonathan leans over the back of the couch and kisses Steve's neck.

Dustin turns away, a big grin on his face.

"You guys want ciders?" Mike asks, coming out of the kitchen, Will inexplicably clinging to his back.

Lucas stares at the two of them, a little dumfounded. "It's eight o'clock in the morning, Mike!"

"Steve, have you turned my little brother into an alcoholic?" Dustin hears Nancy ask.

Steve mutters something too softly for Dustin to catch, but Jonathan barks a laugh, covering his mouth and grinning. He catches Dustin's smile and ducks his head, cheeks flaming.

"I'm not an alcoholic," Mike says, tilting his head as Will kisses his jaw. "I just *really* like this raspberry cider and I'm secretly hoping you all say 'no' so I drink it all without guilt."

"What if I want some?" Will asks, poking Mike in the side.

"You didn't like the raspberry!" Mike says, turning to look at him, adjusting his hands so he can grip Will's thighs, hitch him higher up his back. "You liked the - uh - the - fuck, what was that stuff called? Stan! What was the stuff Will was drinking last night?"

"Blueberry gin with black rum!" Stan shouts, and then turns to the people coming into the hostel. Dustin turns toward them, assessing them quietly. He doesn't want anyone who might judge Steve and Nancy and Jonathan, or Will and Mike to come in and make them uncomfortable. He doesn't want wasps in their hive.

They come in with the rush of rain and the heavy drag of suitcases on

concrete. Their skin is darkened with sun and their hair lightened. One of them, tall and skinny and brown-haired, sweeps Stan into a hug that ends with more enthusiastic tongues and mouths than Dustin has ever seen. He blinks. Eddie is standing near them, wrapped in the arms of a tall, built black boy and a red-headed girl, all of them sporting grins.

"Eds!" The tall one pulls Eddie away from the hug and picks him up around his thighs, kissing him until they back into Stan, who laughs, kissing Eddie over the tall one's shoulder, wrapping his arms around them both.

Someone yells something about losers and Peru and beer, and they all burst into bright affectionate laughter.

Dustin glances to his right and sees Will and Mike in the kitchen, alternating between coffee and booze and making pancakes. He sees Max and Lucas sitting on the counter near them, eating cereal and snorting milk up their nose. Behind him, he can hear Nancy and El talking about eyeliner and blush while Steve mutters something about lipstick that makes them all go quiet for a moment, and then he hears the wet smack of Jonathan pressing a kiss to Steve's cheek.

He knows the brightness of these people, the ones in the lobby and the ones in between the mismatched couches and eating in the kitchen. He remembers Eddie's face for a moment, when he'd mentioned 'life and death shit' and thinks that maybe this is the start of something.

"Dustin!"

He turns back to the lobby and sees Eddie gesturing him over. "C'mere! Come meet the rest of the losers, you dipshit!"

A hand grips his shoulder and pulls him into their sun, and he's looking at seven grinning faces.

"You already met Stan and me, and this is Richie--" Eddie pokes a freckled cheek from his vantage point on Stan's back. Dustin blinks. "--He's the one who looks like your friend--"

"I can't believe I have an evil twin, guys, do you know how fucking exciting that is? Holy shit! *Two* of me, Eds, Stan - babies - could you imagine the *sex*?"

Dustin can't help the bark that falls out of his mouth. Seven pairs of eyes turn to him. "I don't think his boyfriend would appreciate that very much."

"*Anyways*," Eddie snaps, flicking Richie's cheek. "This is Ben--" He gestures to a tall, board-shouldered man with a smile that makes Dustin feel instantly better about this whole situation "--and this is Beverly, our resident badass." A slight, freckled redhead winks at him, and leans into Ben's side. Dustin spots the matching silver bands on their fingers and blinks in surprise. "This is Bill--"

"Our Lord and Saviour," Richie says, putting his hands together in front of his chest. "The father, the son, and the holy--"

"The words 'holy spirit' are *not* allowed out of your mouth, Rich."

Richie pouts and Stan rolls his eyes and kisses his cheek. (Richie *blushes* red, and Dustin doesn't think he's ever seen Mike turn that colour under any circumstances).

"And *that*--" Eddie points at the boy attached to the hand who pulled Dustin into their tiny solar system. "Is Mike, our... I don't want to call him a nerd, but he's a nerd."

Mike shrugs and nods, like *yeah, so?*

In perfect synchronization, fourteen eyes turn to him, all of them gazing at him expectantly. It is, without a doubt, the most intimidating thing he's ever experienced.

"Um," He says, "I'm Dustin."

"Dusty, my boy!" Richie shouts, surging forward and wrapping a heavily tattooed arm around his neck and pulling him close. "Welcome to the Losers' Club!"

Stan groans. "We're not--"

"Yes, w-we are, S-Stanley," Bill says and grins when Stan flips him off.

Dustin laughs. "Come meet *my* Losers' Club."

Richie gasps, claps his hands to his cheeks in a way that looks physically painful, and nearly slaps his glasses off his own face. "There can only be *one*."

"This isn't *Lord of the Rings*, Richie," Dustin says, and grabs his hand, pulling him into the mismatched chairs and couches and the many pillows. He can feel the callouses on Richie's fingers, thick and rough against his palm, and wonders if all the guitars are his.

"Guys!" Dustin says, releasing Richie's hand and gesturing to the Losers', who fan out behind him, like the poster for some terrible movie. A rush of adrenaline sparks along Dustin's fingertips, the heady rush of loud people, of new laughter and trying to remember more names than he knows how to know. He grins, and the feeling - the feeling of something new, something beginning - rises in his chest and out of his mouth.

"Lemme introduce everyone."

He starts with Nancy and Steve and Jonathan, who move away from each other, letting their hands fall away from each other's backs. Tension crackles through their spines, because they weren't being subtle.

Richie makes a crack that he's never met another threesome before, and then some joke about his dick that earns him an eyeroll from Nancy and a rude comeback from Steve. Jonathan snickers, and Dustin watches Richie eye him, like he's trying to figure what kind of joke to crack next.

Next are Lucas and Max. Max says how cute Ben and Beverly are, and Dustin watches them instantly earn points with the others. Lucas tucks her into his side and grins at Mike.

He only gets partway into introducing Mike and Will when Richie is throwing himself forward, throwing an arm around the both of them.

"My motherfucking long-lost twin!" Richie shouts and Will laughs, leaning into his side and tossing a wink at him. Mike relaxes, like all he needs is Will's approval for him to like someone.

"Don't fucking steal my boyfriend, Richie," Mike says. He nods over at Eddie and Stan and winks. "Or I'll steal yours."

Richie laughs. "I'll trade you for Eddie, maybe then I'll get yelled at less."

"Don't count on it," Will and Eddie say, and turn wide grins on each other.

"And this is El," Dustin finishes, cutting off Richie's flirtation with Will, which is blossoming wildly out of control, despite the grins on their faces. "She's our resident badass."

Beverly grins at her. "She's my favourite," She declares, and Ben nods, smiling kindly at El, a little older-brotherly and a little fatherly. El gives them her shy, sweet smile that Dustin is pretty sure is the first reason Mike had fallen in love with her. Bev immediately steps forward and links her fingers in El's and pulls her into a hug, tucking the girl between her and Ben. El smiles up at the both of them, and her cheeks stain pink.

"Hi," she says.

Eddie looks over at the Hawkins' kids, grinning as Richie detaches himself from Mike and Will and immediately plasters up against Stan. "So," he says, and looks over at Will. "You guys want anything to drink?"

Notes for the Chapter:

this chapter is officially for notreddieyall who gave me the inspiration to keep going with this fic! yall can thank them that i actually ended up updating this

comments, concerns, rants, whatever - hit me up on
my tumblr which is gay-for-roxane

6. teeth

Notes for the Chapter:

i dont even know the plot of this honestly like what the fuck

also there's a fivesome? fivesome, is that a thing?

who the fuck knows, not me, so have a thing

also mentions of pennywise

ALSO screech is a nova scotia coming-of-age moonshine that's traditionally drank in copious amounts on someone's sixteenth birthday - it's usually 75% alcohol. its also a brand of rum, which is what will drinks in here, and its 40%

He's not shocked by the boy who looks like Mike. His mannerisms are different enough that it's just a strange coincidence, an odd, out-of-place alignment of the stars. The other boy twists in fingers in front of his sternum when he's nervous and divides his attention between staring fondly at his boyfriends and making jokes so vulgar even Max looks a little offended. (Nancy, of course, thinks he's hilarious). He adjusts his glasses with long fingers and moves constantly, his knee bouncing, shifting his weight. He talks as much as he moves and offers a filterless commentary that Mike would never have.

But he is shocked by the way Will responds to him, by Will in general.

Jonathan is still recovering from the fact that his little brother isn't just queer - which he knew, Will isn't subtle and Jonathan is too awkward not to offer poorly timed brotherly advice - but he's *blatant*. He's handsy with Mike. He runs his hands through his hair and kisses him all tongue and teeth and anyone who comments gets the bird and an immediate suspension of their access to booze. (The small one, with the freckles and the fierce grin, implements this, and everyone quickly becomes afraid of him). Will sits on Mike's lap and curls their fingers together even when they're in different conversations. He steals his cider and wrinkles his nose in disgust and waves away Mike's smug 'I told you you didn't like it.'

He's louder, too, a little rougher around the edges even while he smiles with the kind of sunshine his brother has always been able to emit. He swears more and tells Steve off more often. His jokes are better, a little dryer and sarcastic and less self-deprecating. He responds to Richie's comment about the rain ("Hey, Byers, it's wetter than your mom when she sees me") with a comment about Richie's dad ("Not as wet as your dad's dick when I fuck him, Trashmouth").

Jonathan hasn't really seen Will since that day in the diner when they decided that a road trip would be a good idea. Will's spent five months growing into himself, into his long fingers and lean limbs and his huge eyes. He's grown into his smile, and it looks less like a little boy's smile and more like the smile of a young man, just a hint more canine. His hair is shorter on the sides, long and vibrantly curly on top. He still wears oversized flannels but he wears sweaters too, and jeans that actually fit, converse that aren't six years old and two sizes too big.

No one else seems as surprised as Jonathan to see Will. Nancy doesn't really react to him any different than she did before, and Steve has clearly already adjusted to the enormous amount of PDA between him and Mike. Lucas and Dustin stop the first time he retaliates against Richie but collapse into quick laughter with a shrug. El watches him sometimes, catches her eyes on him. She stares at his hands, and then at the bottle of cider by his feet. Every time Will gesticulates, the bottle moves, just a little. It shifts or rotates. When Eddie and Will are talking about piercings, the pros and cons of getting one and where they'd rather get one and Richie leans over, grabs Will's chin and kisses him, the bottle falls over. Jonathan doesn't notice because he's exchanging a shocked look with Steve and glancing at Mike, then at Richie's boyfriends. Mike's cheeks are flushed and his gaze is fixed on the two of them. The one with the curly hair whispers something that makes Eddie cough and cross his legs. Richie pulls away and Will catches his fingers in the curls at the back of his neck and pulls him back in, leaning back into Mike.

"Mike, do me a favour and stop your boyfriend, please, or else I bust out those stories about Nancy and Jonathan."

Jonathan looks over at the mention of his name, and raises his eyebrow at Steve. He shrugs. "I caught them making out and they

promised me nineteen favours if I didn't tell them about fucking you and Nancy." He tilts the bottle of cider in his hands and Jonathan tracks the movement of his throat.

Richie has his hands bunched in Will's (Mike's) sweater, and he's sitting up on his knees, pushing him back into Mike. Mike's fingers are tangled in Richie's belt loops, holding him close, and his mouth is valiantly attached to Will's neck.

Jonathan pinks and looks away, making eye contact with the tall boy, the one with the reddish hair and the big eyes and the stutter. He smiles, a little sharp. He's leaning back into his boyfriend, the other Mike. They're watching, Jonathan realizes. He looks at the redheaded girl, sitting with her back to her husband's front, El against her front. She's watching, too. So is El, with a tilt to her head, her eyes flickering. Lucas and Dustin are firmly *not* looking, but Max is watching with a raised eyebrow. She brings her thumb up her mouth and bites the nail.

Jonathan looks at Nancy. She's watching, but there's something different in her gaze than the others'. She's not watching to appreciate - there's no heat to the way her eyes track their hands and their mouths and who's where. She nods, and glances at Steve, and then meets his eyes.

Jonathan flushes, ducks his head. She's *learning*, analyzing their movements and the ways they fight together, seeing what she could replicate with him and Steve.

"Okay, that's enough," Steve says, as Richie settles fully into Will's lap. He stands, and walks over to them, grabs Will's ear and Richie's ear and pinches, hard, pulling them apart. "You know," Steve says, over the sound of Richie protesting loudly and Will's attempt to move him, "Nancy and I usually like to put Jonathan in the middle--"

"Steve!" Dustin yelps.

Nancy laughs, clear and bright.

"He's good with his mouth, so Nancy likes that," Steve continues, determinedly unembarrassed, casual. "And he makes the best noises

when I fuck him. *The best.* He's not quite as loud as you, Will, but he's pretty fucking loud."

Will and Richie and Mike's mouths are red, and their cheeks are pink, and Will's neck and ear and faint purple and pale pink, and Will and Mike are both a little green around the edges. Richie winces as Steve releases his ear, and grabs Mike's instead.

Mike squeaks. "Steve--!"

"I told you to stop, Wheeler, and I told you that if you guys didn't fulfill your promise about the PDA I would tell you about Nancy and Jonathan, didn't I?"

Will and Mike nod immediately. "Sorry, Steve," Will says.

"*Really* sorry," Mike mimics.

Steve smiles at them both, and lets go. He winks at Eddie, whose face is painted in bemusement and admiration, and a clear bit of arousal that Steve resolutely ignores. Will and Mike reach up and rub their ears, sheepish and wincing.

Richie stares at Steve as he goes and settles back in the couch. "Wow," He says, adjusting his glasses. "That was a fucking power move, man."

Steve shrugs graciously. "You guys can fuck all you want tonight, I just don't want to see it."

Dustin asks something about the screech he's drinking that pulls Eddie and Mike away, both of them bubbling as they talk booze. Max asks something and they all laugh, before converging on her to explain, and Will goes to laugh, but stops.

He can feel something, something in the tug just behind his eyes, the one that buzzed as he helped Mike that night at the motel.

They all sound a little different - it's how no one can sneak up on him now, and how he always knows who's who during a game of marco polo. Mike has a low, comforting vibration, one that Will feels more than he hears, along his spine and through the tips of his

fingers, like the high of an orgasm and laughing with friends. Lucas' is higher, a low rock and roll bassline, and the sound of a gunshot announcing the beginning of a race. Dustin is always like a piano in another room, the hum of someone reading out loud. Max's is the white noise of a skateboard against side walk, the rumble of an electric guitar. Richie's, he just learned, is softer than he'd ever thought possible, the low hum of wooden windchimes. Steve's is like the slam of converse while playing tag, and Nancy's is the scrap of a pencil across a page. Jonathan's is the careful repeat of the click of a walkman closing.

El sounds like the upside down.

She's soft, like a blanket, the comforting silence of a snowfall in a forest, so loud he can almost see the snow drifting through the sky. She's too soft to be the upside down, but it's enough of a reminder that it used to make his fingers twitch. When they'd first met, whenever she came up behind him he had to fight the panic building in his throat and the clench in his lungs, like desperately cold air.

At the edge of her sound, there's a question. It's a deliberate move, that hint of curiosity that pulls him towards her.

He looks at her. She's already looking at him, and when their eyes lock, he hears her.

It's less of a question and more of a feeling, an image of him and Richie kissing - he flushes, because Richie in his lap and Mike at his back and knowing that Stan and Eddie were watching - and a question, the buzz of her incomprehension.

why did you kiss him? why was mike okay with it?

She could've just asked him properly, but he feels her gratitude, her comfort. She likes using her gifts with him, and likes being able to be heard and responded to the way she was for the first twelve years of her life - through intuition alone. It was why her vocabulary was so lacking when they met her for the first time, because she spoke intuition fluently and could not force her tongue to comprehend spoken language.

He isn't sure how to answer her. Does he ask a question, or does he form more images? Does he push them towards her, or will she hear him if he just thinks it?

Again, she *feels* to him. He sees last week, trust falls in the sand with Steve and Mike, and Mike saying, 'A friend is someone you trust.'

He closes his eyes. He pulls on the rope behind his eyes, draws it into himself, back towards his hippocampus. He thinks of Mike's hands on him and the flush of his cheeks as he pushed into him the first time. He thinks of the feeling of having Mike behind him and Richie in front and the desire to thread his finger's through Stan's and press his mouth to Eddie's. He thinks of the beach, of Steve saying, 'C'mon, kid, I'd never let you get hurt.' He mirrors her image of the trust falls. He bundles it up, imagines wrapping the thoughts in a book. He opens his eyes and looks at El.

He passes her the book.

Her eyes widen and her mouth falls open. She cracks into a grin, raw and bright. Her eyes move like she's reading the pages of a book. Trembling fingers push her hair away from her face, and Will watches as understanding spreads over her eyebrows and mouth and eyes, in the sharp line of her jaw. She's so happy, unshamed and grateful that it washes over Will like the cold water of the ocean rushing over his feet. It leaks out, from her to him. They both laugh, and converge on each other, wrapping each other in hugs. He hears her. He knows her, too, knows her sadness and the edges of her ability and the tremble of her pleased heart.

He pulls away from her and knocks his glass of screech against her bottle of apple cider, downing it all in one go, relishing in the burn of it washing down his throat, the burn through to his stomach.

The bonfire from the other night - loud music and fireworks and the intoxicating joy of family and strangers.

He smiles at her, and hugs her again. He wraps both hands around her back and tucks her into him. She's smaller than him - and her head fits beneath his chin. Her hands lock behind his shoulders.

"Um," Richie's voice breaks through the thrum of the tug. "What the fuck?"

Will lets El go, turns to Richie and raises an eyebrow. He raises a glass of Bailey's to him in a toast and winks.

Their mouths together, the smooth slide of their tongues, the give of Richie's bottom lip between his teeth, the feeling of the hard line of his cock against Will's stomach, and the heat of Mike beneath him. The sting of Mike's teeth in his neck. The intense, unfiltered desire for Eddie and Stan, too, their hands and their mouths. The image of Mike and Will's bedroom, and the five of them piled onto a queen-sized bed, tangled up in sunflower yellow sheets.

He wraps the thoughts up in a mason jar full of pot and hands it to Richie, and Eddie and Mike and Stan.

They all freeze, and stare at him. Eddie goes for it first, scrunching his face in concentration, and then flushing pink. He licks his lips. Richie out and out *moans*, and Mike leans over to press a wet kiss to Stan's mouth, eager and loud.

He feels the buzz of El giving something to the others.

"Wait, what the fuck?" Dustin asks, sitting up in his chair, blinking. "You two can *talk* to each other, but like *with your minds*?"

"What the fuck?" Lucas says, voice faint.

"What the fuck," El agrees, shrugging.

"And you can--" Nancy gestures at the empty glass of screech by Will's foot. They'd finished the last bottle an hour ago, and Eddie had mentioned more in the cellar, but everyone was too warm to get it. She points at the glass of Bailey's in his hand, and then the bottle of Bailey's in the kitchen, twenty feet away.

"Yep," Will says.

"W-When d-did this-s -- did this s-start?" Bill asks and smiles lightly at Will.

"The life-and-death shit," Eddie says, and looks at Dustin. Dustin nods.

All the Losers stop, looking at Bill. Something passes between them that makes El shiver next to him. Something dark, but bright, foreboding and cold, the bitter taste of adrenaline on tongues and sweat running in eyes. A tall man, covered in puss and blood and scabs, reeking of rot, saying something about a blowjob; the scream of someone lost and the stink of burning flesh and hair; a little boy in a yellow raincoat, his face pale, his eyes all wrong, screaming; a man, with sharp eyes and dirty hands, ones that scrap over breasts and necks; a headless thing; a woman with a face stretched, her mouth screaming, her teeth unending; a clown with yellow eyes and white skin and row upon row of teeth. A missing person poster with Richie's name emblazoned across it, the sound of Eddie screaming, Richie telling him not to look. A clicking projector. A house with rotting floors and a well. A boy with a mullet, holding a knife. A baseball bat and a metal bar, blood covering everything, its iron-and-licorice taste in mouths and noses and throats, on skin.

Will stumbles, a choked noise falling from his throat.

He stares at Bill, breathing heavily, feels tears fall down his cheeks, the fear caught in his stomach and behind his knees.

"Oh, God," Mike says, and his voice shakes. He catches Will before he falls, going down with him, holding him in his lap. He presses their foreheads together.

"Fuck," Will breathes.

"God, I thought the Mind Flayer was bad," Dustin says, and his voice cracks.

He must've broadcast, Will thinks, and winces as the images roll through his mind.

"The what?" Bev asks. She's got her arms around El, holding her into her chest.

El shakes her head desperately. A sob falls from her mouth.

"Evil creature from another dimension that Will got stuck in for a week and then got possessed by. It almost killed all of us. It almost got Will." Dustin is quieter than Will has heard him in years.

"El stopped it, though," Max says, and her voice doesn't shake.

"God, we're one fucked up group, aren't we?" Richie says. He's kneeling next to Will, his fingers caught in Stan's. Eddie places a soft, small hand on Will's back, and Will pushes into the touch. Stan tucks closer, his mouth to Will's temple. Richie curls his hand around the back of Mike's neck, presses his mouth to Mike's jaw. Eddie combs his fingers through Mike's hair.

They sit like that until the thrum bouncing through their skulls fades from fear and tension to comfort, gentleness. They pull away one by one, pile back onto the couch. They sit, quiet, for a few moments.

Nancy watches them from between Steve and Jonathan. Dustin smiles at Max as she yawns and tucks closer to Lucas. Bill and Mike are fast asleep, their legs tangled together, their fingers intertwined.

"Mike," She says, soft, but with a sharp kind of look in her eyes. "Take the boys up to your room. Three oh eight, right?"

Mike nods, and tugs them all up, curled around each other as they are.

They creep up creaking stairs, one flight, two flights, three flights. They stop outside room three oh eight, and Will had honestly expected a loss - the clown and the blood and the smell of rotting flesh is now permanently in his mind, lurking in a dark corner with the mindflayer and the horrible cold of not being alone in his own mind - but there's a something that passes between them now. Something in the way Eddie's gaze tracks Mike's movement and the ways Stan's hand feels, pressed against his lower back. Part of him worries that this is too much - they met these three boys less than nine hours ago and him and Mike have only been together for three weeks and there's a heat in Richie's gaze that tells him where this is going, but that part of him is very small and very scared and he's tired of being both of those things.

So, he loops his fingers in Eddie's belt loops and pulls him closer, until the other boy is tucked between his thighs, the two of them pressed together. Eddie has to tilt his head back to look him in the eye and the rush of power that Will gets from that goes straight to his cock. He licks over the seam of Eddie's mouth and grins when he whines, pressing their lips together, sucking on Eddie's tongue and dragging over the roof of his mouth. On either side of him, he hears Richie swear and Mike gasp. Eddie groans and digs his hands in Will's hair. Stan presses up behind him, brushing his hands over his waist and kissing the nape of his neck. He shivers. Broad hands land on Will's ass, and twin mouths bite at his neck, at his pulse point.

He moans into Eddie's mouth, brings both of his hands up to cradle his jaw and pull him closer. Small hands leave his hair and land on his chest, nails digging into his collarbones. Someone's fingers replace Eddie's in his hair and pull him back, tilting his head against the wall. He looks at Mike, whose pupils are blown, his lips tugged in a soft, slightly awed smile. Richie leans forward, his hair brushing Will's forehead and grabs Mike's chin, pulling him forward into a messy, unfiltered kiss, all teeth. He tugs on Mike's bottom lip and bites when he moans.

Eddie makes a little noise and Will tilts his head to watch Stan hold Eddie's head back against his shoulder as he bites into his jaw and down his throat. There's a sharp sting of nails against Will's collarbone.

"Bed," Stan says, and they all give noises of agreement - a moan into Richie's mouth and a nod through the haze of hickeys and tongues and want. Mike fumbles for the key to the room, and Eddie and Will's breath stutters as Richie plasters himself to his back, his hands tight on his hips, his mouth insistent against his ear. He bites at the cartilage and grins when Mike whimpers.

"C'mon, Mikey," He murmurs, "Wanna fuck you and your boyfriend, but I don't wanna give the whole building a show." Mike's hands tremble. Richie noses behind his ear, licks from his clavicle to his jaw. "C'mon," He says, soft. "I'm fuck you and suck your cock and Eddie's gonna get his mouth on you and you're gonna love it, he's so good, Mike. Mike, *Mike* let me fuck you." He grinds against Mike's ass and grins as he moans, blindly searching for the lock. Tucked into

Will's side, Eddie moans. Stan tilts his chin up and kisses him.

Mike twists the lock, and pushes forward.

Richie has Mike up against the wall next to the door in a moment, pulling their shirts over their heads and dropping to his knees. Mike's head falls back against the door with a thud. "Richie, *fuck*."

Stan gets a grip on Will's hair and pulls him closer. He kisses him, though it's more of a bite and a swip of his tongue across his lip, before he turns him around, presses him into the wall and nips at his neck. He does it in the same spot, over and over, until Will whines a bit, the pleasure dipping into pain. He moves an inch up and does it again. Will grins when he hears Mike swear. He looks over, panting through the sting of Stan's teeth. Richie and Eddie have Mike against the wall, both of them on their knees in front of him. Richie pulls off him, and Will moans as Stan pushes him harder into the wall and Eddie kisses Richie messily, deliberately ignoring the noises falling from Mike's mouth.

Mike turns his head towards him, flickering over Stan's huge hands pinning his hands up on the wall. Mike's eyes flutter close and his hands knot in Eddie's hair. Will watches Eddie moan, and gag and moan again, Richie's hand at the back of his neck holding him in place. He looks good on his knees, and Will buckles.

"Stan," Will gasps. His hands are going to leave bruises on Will's hips and he'll look like he's been mauled but the sharp bite of almost-pleasure makes his mouth fall open. "Stan, please."

Stan grins against his neck. "Yes, Will?"

"Please, *fuck*, please." He's still looking at the other three (Eddie's still on Mike's cock, but Richie's standing next to him, kissing his shoulder and pinching his nipple. He must be talking, because every few moments, Mike whimpers and bucks his hips forward and Richie grins, smug and hopelessly turned-on), but Stan's caging him in, and he *wants*.

"Please, what, Will?" Stan murmurs.

Everything, Will thinks, even as Stan turns him around and not-kisses him again. He peels off his shirt and does quick work on his jeans, leaving him in Mike's underwear and nothing else. Stan pulls back, just for a moment, and watches him. He tilts his head back to look at him and gets the opposite rush he did when he kissed Eddie. He gets the burn of submission in his throat and an unerring desire to drop to his knees. Stan raises an eyebrow and he falls, reaching for Stan's belt and zipper, pulling down his boxers and swallowing him down without pretense. He's good at this - Mike was very vocal in telling him - and he enjoys it. The sounds of Mike and Eddie and Richie so close, and the knowing that Stan is still fully dressed, makes him moan. Stan's fingers tighten in his hair, but other than that, he doesn't react at all.

He doesn't know how long he stays there, Stan's cock down his throat and his hands in his hair, but when he pulls off non-chalantly, and urges Will to his feet, he has a momentary burst of confusion.

He's almost immediately pulled into the familiar comfort of Mike's body, whose hands shake. He's lost his jeans and he's only half-hard in his boxers. Will looks over at Eddie, who's pinned between Richie and Stan, at the glisten on his chin that catches the dim lighting of the room.

"Was he good?" Will asks, and pulls Mike close enough to kiss. Mike's hands fall to his thighs and hitch him up his body, sturdy and lean. Will leans down to kiss him, tilts his head back with a hand in his curls.

"So good," Mike mutters and licks over the deep, purpling bruises Stan has left all over the left side of his neck. Will whines. Someone comes up behind him, puts his hands on his waist and pulls his head back until his weight is anchored on Mike's hips and Richie's shoulder. Richie kisses him, sucks on his tongue again, digs his fingers into his cheek and his jaw to urge his mouth farther open. Will lets him, pliant.

"Bed," Eddie says, breathless. Stan has him on his knees in front of him, facing out, holding his head in one hand, making sure he watches, and his wrists in the other, making sure he can't touch.

Mike walks forward at the same moment Richie walks back, until his knees hit the bed and they tumble back. Will arches up into Mike, presses his ass into Richie's hips.

He feels the mattress dip as Eddie kneels next to him, his hands next to his face so he can kiss Will, and then lean over his shoulder and kiss Richie. Stan methodically strips Eddie, leaves him naked, licks over the skin between his ass and thigh.

"Please," Eddie whines, and kisses Will.

Will's hands knot in Mike's hair as he slides down his body, biting a hickey into his hipbone, moving over his dick to leave one on his thigh.

Will whimpers, and then begs.

Richie smiles.

Notes for the Chapter:

uhh, as usual lemme know what you guys think if you have any suggestions or comments or things to yell at me about you can hit me up at gay-for-roxane

Author's Note:

thanks so much for reading my loves!
come and bother me on tumblr @blue-by-auster or leave a comment to lemme know what you think. i wanna hear your criticism and your love so hit me up

x
mads